

It will send a direct check to Americans struggling with a once-in-a-lifetime financial burden. It will boost vaccine distribution. And it will provide funding and guidance for schools to reopen as quickly and safely as possible.

That last point, in particular, should appeal to my Republican friends who have been raising concern about school closures. We all want the schools to reopen safely. We are all worried about the cost of virtual learning on children and parents.

The solution is simple. It is not giving a speech here on the Senate floor. It is not criticizing teachers or school administrators. It is giving school districts the funding they need to reopen safely. It is expensive—expensive—to reopen safely during the COVID crisis. We want to do it as quickly as possible, and it is hard to understand that our Republican friends are saying: “Open up the schools” and “I won’t vote for any money for the schools” to do just that. It is a complete contradiction.

The Republican position seems to be that these difficult challenges will fix themselves, that we don’t need any more aid; we did enough already. Anyone who knows anything about schools knows, in the vast majority of schools in this country, that is just not the case.

So let our Republican friends put their votes where their speeches are, in helping the schools, in getting the money, in opening the schools safely—not in simply trying to make a political point and then trashing the schools without giving them the money they need. It makes no sense whatsoever. It is a total contradiction.

Also, if we don’t act, enhanced unemployment benefits will expire for millions of Americans in need. If we don’t act, millions of struggling families will miss out on direct payments and an expansion of the child tax credit and the earned income tax credit. If we don’t act, we risk the same long, slow, and painful recovery we experienced after the financial crisis of 2008, when Congress did too little to get our country back on track.

The worst thing we could do would be to slow down now before the race is won. We will not do that. Later this week, the House—and, soon thereafter, the Senate—will start working on President Biden’s American Rescue Plan.

Mayors, Governors, and economists from across the political spectrum agree that it should be a sizable effort. Treasury Secretary Yellen told us that “the smartest thing we can do is act big.” Federal Chairman Powell warned that we are “a long way off from full recovery” and that the greater risk lies in doing too little rather than doing too much.

Most importantly, the American people in poll after poll overwhelmingly approve of President Biden’s American Rescue Plan. One of the last polls I saw showed a majority of Republicans—vot-

ers, citizens, Americans, Republican citizens, Republican Americans—agree with this plan. The Nation understands that we are not out of the woods yet and that Congress should do what is necessary to finish the job. Where are our Republican friends?

As I have said from the start, Democrats remain committed to working with our colleagues from the other side of the aisle to improve the bill, but at the end of the day, the American people sent us here with a job to do, and the clock is ticking. Democrats will not wait to move forward with the American Rescue Plan and taking the next important step in getting our country back to normal.

#### PROTESTS

Mr. President, finally, January 6 is a day all of us will remember forever. The Capitol was breached by a violent mob. The Confederate flag was flown in the halls of our Union for the first time in American history. Insurrectionists—angry, bigoted—stood a few inches from where I am standing now. It is hard to believe these hallowed halls were occupied by such terrible, awful lawbreakers. Five Americans lost their lives, including a Capitol Police officer.

The impeachment of Donald Trump was one necessary consequence of the attack of January 6, but it is far from the only one. We must and will continue to reckon with the events of that day. This morning—in fact, as we speak—the Senate Rules Committee and the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee are holding a joint hearing to examine the attack on the Capitol. The committees will hear important testimony from the acting chief of the Capitol Police, the former chief of police, and former members of the Sergeant at Arms. Later this week, Senators will be briefed by the acting chief of police and the Acting Sergeant at Arms on the current and future security measures around the Capitol.

It is our solemn responsibility to protect the Capitol and everyone who works and visits within it. It is our solemn duty to prevent a day like January 6 from ever, ever being repeated. At the same time, the Capitol has been and must be once again a symbol of democracy that is accessible to the people. No one expects the Capitol to remain a militarized zone in perpetuity. As I said, no one expects the Capitol to remain a militarized zone in perpetuity. We must strive to strike the difficult balance between access and security and better understand the intelligence and security failures that led to the attack on January 6. This will be a crucial and bipartisan undertaking. I am glad that Senators from both the Rules and Homeland Security Committees, from both parties, are starting that important work today.

I now yield the floor.

#### RECOGNITION OF THE MINORITY LEADER

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Republican leader is recognized.

#### CORONAVIRUS

Mr. MCCONNELL. Mr. President, millions of American kids in the public school system have been robbed of a year, and counting, of anything resembling a proper education. It has been a historically tough year. That is why Americans are so excited our Nation appears to be approaching a major turning point.

Here are just a few recent headlines:

A U.S. Vaccine Surge Is Coming, With Millions of Doses Promised

Another headline:

America’s vaccine rollout has been among the best in the world

Another headline:

CDC finds scant spread of coronavirus in schools with precautions in place

Here is one from my home State:

COVID-19 cases plummet in Kentucky nursing homes, a key target for the vaccine

So let’s take a look at the economy:

U.S. Retail Sales Surprise With Sharpest Advance in Seven Months

Blue-Collar Jobs Boom as COVID-19 Boosts Housing, E-Commerce Demand

Another headline:

Consumer Demand Snaps Back. Factories Can’t Keep Up.

To be clear, this isn’t over. The battle is not won yet. But the day is approaching when we will be able to end this defensive crouch and safely reclaim our normal lives.

Last year the Senate built the largest peacetime fiscal expansion in American history. We spent \$4 trillion on five overwhelmingly bipartisan packages. The most recent became law just 2 months ago. Funding for hospitals and providers kept our healthcare system above water. The Paycheck Protection Program saved Main Street small businesses. Direct relief and extra unemployment aid helped working families endure the shutdown. Operation Warp Speed laid the groundwork for our historic sprint toward vaccinations.

These were strong, bipartisan policies, targeted to what families specifically needed to wage the war, but today Democrats are steamrolling ahead with a massive spending plan on a completely partisan basis. It did not receive a single House Republican vote in committee yesterday because their partisan plan is not targeted toward helping Americans reclaim their lives and their country from this invader. Instead, here is what it is: a combination of miscellaneous, non-COVID-related, liberal wish-list items and the kinds of bandaid policies that make a defensive crouch slightly less painful but don’t help get us back on offense.

Let’s take a look at K-12 schooling. Until very recently, the new administration’s own scientists had been crystal clear. Earlier this month, CDC Director Rochelle Walensky said:

There is increasing data to suggest that schools can safely reopen.

A major CDC study found in-person schooling does not—not—fuel community transmission.